

IOC 2024 BID INSPECTORS IMPRESSED AFTER PARIS TOUR

PARIS: Olympic officials admitted that they would have to "really nitpick" to find fault after spending yesterday inspecting potential sites for the Paris 2024 bid. The IOC's 11-member evaluation commission, who examined rival bidders Los Angeles last week, started their day with a visit to the Eiffel Tower, the iconic backdrop to the triathlon start should the French capital be chosen to host the Games.

They had a bird's eye view from the Tower of many proposed venues including the Champs-Élysées and Grand Palais, and Saint-Denis to the north-east of the city where the Olympic village will be situated. The compact nature of Paris' Olympic venues is offered as one of the bid's main selling points with over 80 percent of venues covering 22 sports within a radius of 10 kilometres (8 miles) making "Paris an Olympic park".

The bid inspectors, led by Switzerland's Patrick Baumann, were then greeted at the Stade de France by Lilian Thuram who won the 1998 World Cup at the national stadium. "We have to seduce them with emotion, that it would be fantastic if it was Paris, but also show that infrastructures also serve the people," Thuram said beside the stadium's athletics track.

Joining Thuram at the Stade de France to press home the virtues of choosing Paris were Beijing Games 100m swimming champion Alain Bernard and multiple Paralympic champion Marie-Amélie Le Fur. During the tour Baumann broke sweat by testing his sprinting prowess against a bunch of youngsters and grabbed the opportunity to take a selfie with Tony Estanguet, France's three-time Olympic canoeing champion and the bid's co-chairman.

VISITS TO ALL SITES

The Olympic bid exam board went on to visit all of the proposed 2024 sites in and around Paris, like the home of the French Open Roland Garros but also the non-sporting sites like the Champs-de-Mars, the central Paris park which will stage beach volleyball should Paris and not Los Angeles win the IOC vote in Lima in September. "To find fault, you really need to nitpick," said Baumann at the end of the inspection. "We had confirmation that with the Champs-de-Mars, the Grand Palais, Roland Garros, everything's there!"

After rubbing shoulders with French track and field gold medalists from the Paris-hosted World Athletics Championships in 2003 (Christine



PARIS: Co-president of the Paris bid for the 2024 Olympics Tony Estanguet poses for a selfie with members of the bidding team at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Evaluation Commission continues with its visit to Paris yesterday. — AFP

Arron, Muriel Hurtis, Leslie Djhone, Eunice Barber), the Olympic officials rounded off their day in the company of three Olympic boxing champions, Tony Yoka, Estelle Mossely (both 2016) and

Brahim Asloum (2008). "We were very happy to see many Olympic, world and European champions," said Baumann. "It's clear that the passion and enthusiasm for these Games and for the different stadi-

ums are great and impressive." Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, speaking alongside Estanguet, stressed that "France wants to welcome the world, France is behind us. "Legacy is above all human." — AFP

TOTTI ALL SMILES AS DEFIANT ROMA KEEP JUVE WAITING

MILAN: Club icon Francesco Totti applauded from the sidelines then celebrated at the whistle as Roma kept Juventus waiting for the Serie A title with a defiant 3-1 win at the Stadio Olimpico on Sunday. Treble-chasing Juventus travelled to the capital hoping to secure at least a point to mathematically ensure a record sixth consecutive scudetto with two games to spare. But despite heading in for the half-time on equal terms after Daniele De Rossi levelled Mario Lemina's 21st minute opener for the visitors, Juventus were stunned by a pair of second-half strikes from Stephan El Shaarawy and Radja Nainggolan.

Roma's 26th win of the campaign moved Luciano Spalletti's men back up to second place, only four points off the lead, to sit one point ahead of Napoli, who saw Jose Callejon hit a brace in a 5-0 rout at Torino earlier. It kept the capital side in contention for the league's second automatic Champions League spot and, to boot, ended Juve's hopes of celebrating at the ground of their bitter league rivals. "After Napoli's win (earlier), the league standings started to worry us a little," said Roma captain De Rossi. "Juve started well and we went down a goal. All they needed was a draw, but we responded well. It was a great game, and a great night."

Juve can wrap up the title with a win at home to relegation-haunted Crotona next week, but their fifth defeat of the campaign ended Massimiliano Allegri's hopes of securing the scudetto before they face Lazio in the Italian Cup final on Wednesday. "We did well in the opening half, we kept it tight in defence, but then we thought we had the game wrapped up and took our foot off the pedal," Allegri told Mediaset.

"Hats off to Roma, but this will just make us more determined for next week, and for Wednesday." Allegri rested several players as the champions, who face Real Madrid in the June 3 Champions League final, target an unprecedented club treble. Argentinian playmaker Paulo Dybala started on the bench alongside defenders Giorgio Chiellini and Dani Alves, handing a rare start to Mario Lemina. Only days ago the Frenchman complained of his lack of playing time in Turin, but after a couple of early Juve chances he was eating his words.

Ghanaian defender Kwadwo Asamoah, too, was given a rare start and drew gasps with a ferocious left-foot drive following a corner that smashed off the upright after just seven minutes. Gonzalo Higuain's drive then curled over, but the visitors broke the deadlock soon after, Lemina side-footing Higuain's generous ball past Wojciech Szczesny after controlling Stefano Sturaro's long ball from midfield. Roma striker Edin Dzeko's absence due to a calf strain robbed Roma of the aerial threat usually provided by the Bosnian.

But when Kostas Manolas rose high to meet a corner with a powerful header that forced Juve 'keeper Gianluigi Buffon to parry, the rebound fell to De Rossi, who beat the Italy 'keeper at the second time of asking. Roma resumed in determined fashion after the interval, De Rossi earning a quick caution after clattering into Miralem Pjanic. Minutes later, the Olimpico erupted - and Totti began clapping - when El Shaarawy goal collected a cross from Nainggolan, cut inside and unleashed a low, right-footed strike that took a slight deflection before squeezing inside the far post of Gianluigi Buffon's net.—AFP



(Left) Real Madrid's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring during the Spanish league football match Real Madrid CF vs Sevilla FC at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium on Sunday. **(Right)** Las Palmas' defender Pedro Bigas Rigo (right) vies with Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi during the Spanish league football match UD Las Palmas vs FC Barcelona at the Gran Canaria stadium in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on Sunday. — AFP



REAL MADRID, BARCA SET UP FINAL DAY TITLE SHOWDOWN

MADRID: The fight for the La Liga title will go down to the last day of the season after convincing wins for Real Madrid and Barcelona on Sunday left them locked together on 87 points at the top of the table. Madrid remain in the driving seat after the European champions saw off Sevilla 4-1 as they have two games remaining to Barca's one. However, Barca remain on top thanks to their better head-to-head record with Neymar scoring a hat-trick as they also won 4-1 at Las Palmas.

Madrid visit Celta in their game in hand tomorrow and then travel to Malaga, whilst Barca host Eibar on the final day next Sunday. Sevilla's defeat at the Bernabeu also guarantees they will finish fourth and Atletico Madrid, who drew 1-1 at Real Betis, qualify automatically for next season's Champions League in third. At the bottom, Sporting Gijon joined Granada and Osasuna in being relegated despite winning 1-0 at Eibar as Deportivo La Coruna secured safety in a 0-0 draw at Villarreal.

"It is a long road. We know to win the league in Spain is not easy," said Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane. "Every day we are getting closer, we keep winning but there are two games to go and we need to keep doing what we have until now." However, the fact two of Barca's four league defeats this season came at the two sides Madrid have still to visit gives the Catalans' boss Luis Enrique hope. "We have one game left and the objective is to win it," he told TV station Movistar. "If we have lost (there) then any team can." Sevilla have now won just three of their last 13 games as their season has petered out to a disappointing end. However, they gave Madrid more than a few scares at the Santiago Bernabeu. Nacho gave the hosts the lead in controversial fashion as he curled home a quick free-kick with the Sevilla defence caught unawares and their protests towards referee Alberto Undiano Mallenco falling on deaf ears. That goal meant Madrid broke Bayern Munich's European record for scoring in consecutive games as their streak now stretches to 61 games.

RONALDO REACHES 400

Sevilla fired their first warning shot when Stefan Jovetic smashed a shot against the post from the edge of the area. However, moments later it was 2-0 as Sergio Rico could only palm James Rodriguez's effort into the path of Cristiano Ronaldo to score his 400th Madrid goal. Jovetic then saw a fine chipped effort come back off the bar and was denied by Keylor Navas when played through by Joaquin Correa as Sevilla continued to threaten. And they finally got back in the game through Jovetic's neat finish from outside the box three minutes into the second-half.

Yet, just as the hosts' nerves were becoming

frayed, Ronaldo appeared once more by crashing home Toni Kroos's cut-back to restore Real's two goal lead. And Kroos rounded off the scoring himself by prodding into the far corner six minutes from time. Barcelona kept the pressure on despite a series of defensive absences that meant Brazilian 21-year-old Marlon Santos was handed a full debut in the Canary Islands.

The visitors still hand all of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar to call on up front and the latter two combined to give Barca a 2-0 half-time

lead. After wonderful passes from Sergio Busquets and Andres Iniesta, Suarez squared for Neymar to open the scoring. The roles were reversed two minutes later as Neymar's chip freed Suarez to dink home his 36th goal of the season. Pedro Bigas momentarily gave Las Palmas hope just after the hour mark. But Neymar headed home Ivan Rakitic's cross and then sealed his first hat-trick of the season 19 minutes from time when he slotted in Jordi Alba's through ball. — AFP



ROME: Roma's midfielder from Egypt Mohamed Salah (right) vies with Juventus' midfielder from Germany Sami Khedira during the Italian Serie A football match Roma vs Juventus on Sunday at the Olympic stadium. — AFP

SHARAPOVA WINS IN ROME

ROME: Maria Sharapova broke seven times to win her opening match at the Rome Masters yesterday, with the Russian wild card advancing over American Christina McHale 6-4, 6-2. The five-time Grand Slam champion, who is coming back onto the WTA after completing a 15-month doping ban, advanced to the second round at the sun-drenched Foro Italico as she beat McHale for a fifth time in a row. The former No 1, whose ranking has recovered into the 200s after a Stuttgart semifinal and a second round last week in Madrid, overcame seven double-faults in victory on the clay in 90 minutes.

She came through a hic-cup near the end, losing serve as she prepared to wrap it up while leading 5-1, but recovered in the next game to emerge the winner. Sharapova is still waiting to hear if she will receive a wild card entry into Roland Garros starting a week from Sunday. "I'll focussed on my match, I'm playing tomorrow," Sharapova said; "But nothing is a disappointment after being away from the game for 15 months."

The match began unsteadily, with three breaks of serve in the first 17 minutes, McHale took an early 3-1 lead. But the rhythm steadied as the experienced Sharapova pegged back her opponent and got to work to sweep the first set from the back foot. Sharapova is playing Rome for the ninth time, winning the title in 2011, 2012 and two years ago; the 30-

year-old owns 11 WTA tour-level titles on clay. "Winning matches will get me places, so if that's where it got me today, then I will take it," the Russian said. "The fact that I'm back and playing three weeks in a row now and three events in a row for me is a big deal. That's my focus."

In the ATP men's first round, ninth seed David Goffin beat Thomaz Bellucci 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 and American Sam Querrey upset French 11th seed Lucas Pouille 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (10/8). Tomas Berdych, the number 12, beat German Mischa Zverev 7-6 (9-7), 6-4; Jan-Lennard Struff put out Australian Bernard Tomic 6-7 (6-8), 6-1, 6-4. —AFP



ROME: Maria Sharapova of Russia returns the ball to Christina McHale of the US during their tennis match at the ATP Tennis Open tournament yesterday. — AFP

FALCAO FIRES MONACO TO BRINK OF FRENCH TITLE

PARIS: Radamel Falcao scored twice as Monaco strode to within a point of the Ligue 1 title after Sunday's 4-0 home win over Lille left them on the verge of dethroning Paris Saint-Germain. The Colombian striker netted either side of a Bernardo Silva goal before Junior Alonso bundled into his own net as Monaco reeled off a 10th straight league victory, although PSG's 5-0 rout of Saint-Etienne prevented Leonardo Jardim's side from officially securing the title.

Monaco lead the reigning champions by three points - and have a game in hand against Saint-Etienne tomorrow - ahead of next weekend's final round of matches, but their vastly superior goal difference all but guarantees them an eighth French league crown. "Before the match we needed four points. Now we need just one," said Jardim, with the Portuguese leaving nothing to chance. "We'll keep working hard until the end. On Wednesday we need to pick up the points to win the title. We had to be careful (against Lille) and we were. Paris scored five goals and aren't giving up. I'm asking for one final effort on Wednesday."

Falcao calmed any lingering nerves by handing Monaco the perfect start at the Stade Louis II when he headed in unmarked from Thomas Lemar's left-wing cross after just six minutes. Kylian Mbappe tormented the Lille defence as he wriggled past Franck Beria to set up Silva for a simple tap-in on the stroke of half-time, with the teenager teeing up Falcao for his second on 69 minutes.

Junior Alonso then turned a Lemar cross beyond Lille goalkeeper Mike Maignan late on as Monaco put their midweek Champions League semi-final defeat to Juventus behind them in convincing fashion. Edinson Cavani climbed up to 35 league goals this term with a brace as PSG

demolished Saint-Etienne, ending the hosts' outside shot of qualifying for the Europa League.

'NOT ENOUGH THIS YEAR'

Lucas also scored twice for Unai Emery's men while Julian Draxler added a fifth, but the capital club's four-year reign in France is effectively over with just next Saturday's visit of Caen to come. "Monaco have had a great season but they're not yet mathematically champions," said Emery, although his side's goal difference of plus-56 trails well behind Monaco's 73. Congratulations to Monaco for the work they've done. This competition is good for French football," he added. "With the number of points we have we could have been champions, but it's not enough this year with the competition from Monaco." Nice suffered a first home defeat of the campaign as goals from Angers skipper Cheikh Ndoeye and Karl Toko Ekambi secured a 2-0 victory at the Allianz Riviera, while Marseille remain in control of their European destiny following a 1-1 draw at Bordeaux. Uruguay international Diego Rolan grabbed an early opener for Bordeaux, but Bafetimbi Gomis hit his 19th goal of the season to keep fifth-place Marseille a point ahead of the home side.—AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Arsenal v Sunderland	21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
Manchester City v Albion	22:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2	